

MASTER PLAN  
MAY 2011

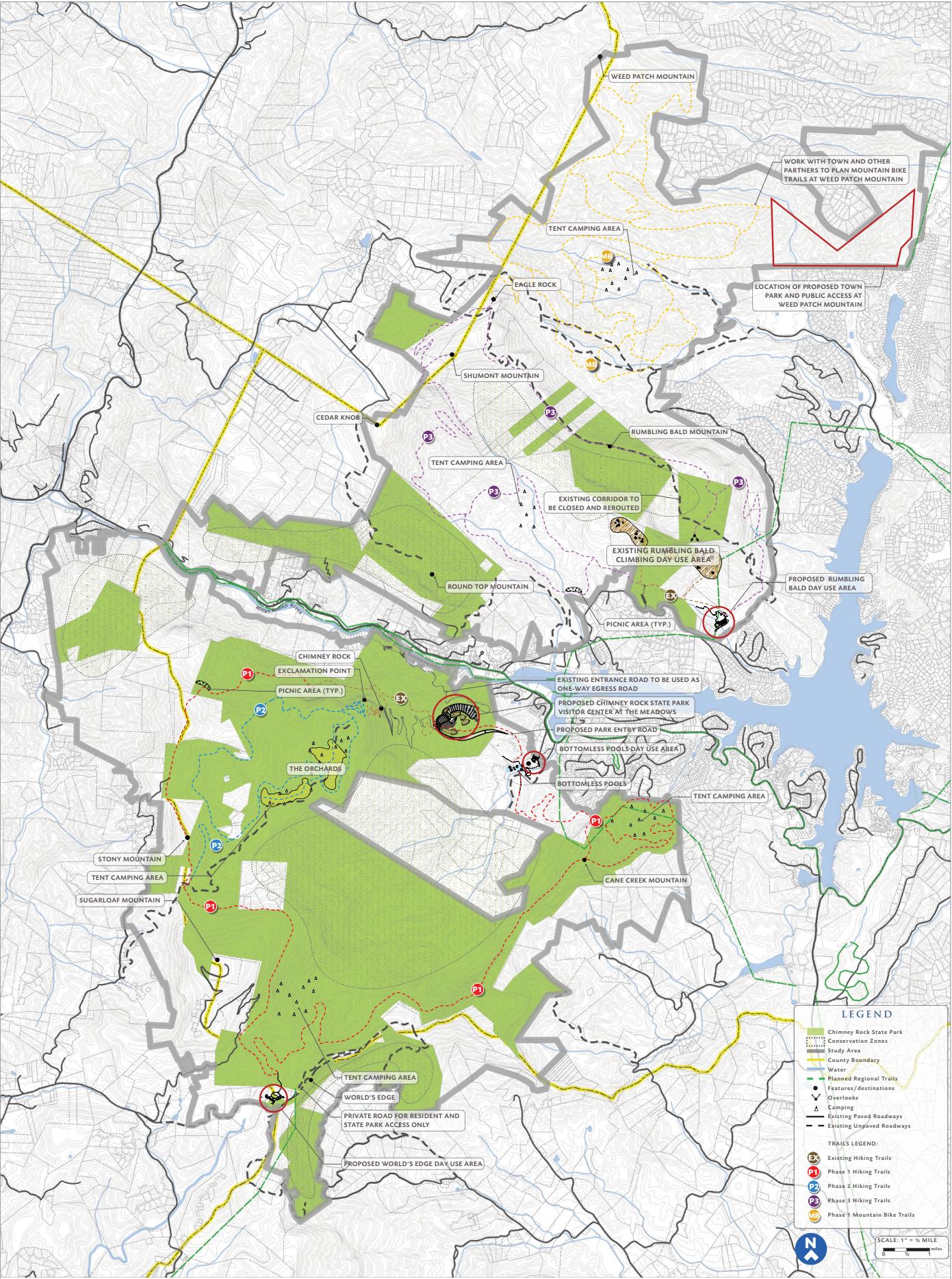
# CHIMNEY ROCK STATE PARK



## *EXECUTIVE SUMMARY*

N.C. DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES  
DIVISION OF PARKS AND RECREATION

CHIMNEY ROCK STATE PARK MASTER PLAN





# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## INTRODUCTION

Chimney Rock State Park is a world-class destination park located on the eastern edge of the Blue Ridge Mountains in southwestern North Carolina. The state park is comprised of notable landscapes and significant ecological resources, most of which are located within the Hickory Nut Gorge region. The 4,531-acre park straddles four counties: Buncombe, Henderson, Polk and Rutherford.

Chimney Rock State Park is a tremendous natural resource, containing high quality, intact, and unique natural communities, rare species of plants, animals, rock outcrops, steep slopes, balds and waterfalls. The state park contains a diverse combination of flora and fauna due to its proximity within two different physiographic regions, the southern Blue Ridge Mountains and the Piedmont, and encompasses eight significant natural heritage areas, recognized for the presence of rare species and high quality natural communities. The state park also contains a number of important natural communities characterized by vegetation composition and appearance, wildlife, topography, hydrology, soils and other abiotic factors.

## VISION

This master plan is structured within a 100-year vision, 25-year master plan and 5-year action plan for Chimney Rock State Park. The vision for the future of the state park builds upon the unique history of the former Chimney Rock Park while conserving important natural areas and meeting the needs of future park visitors. The following statement articulates the vision for the state park:

Chimney Rock State Park will be a destination that enhances the stewardship and enjoyment of the state's natural and cultural resources; a place that provides a range of nature-based recreation experiences consistent with the ecological character and scenic beauty of Hickory Nut Gorge; which supports interpretive programs that educate and inform visitors about the park's unique flora and fauna, distinct geology, sensitive and endangered species, and conservation and preservation practices.

## MISSION AND GOALS

The N.C. State Parks System exists for the enjoyment, education, health and inspiration of all citizens and visitors. The mission of the state parks system is to:

*“Conserve and protect representative examples of the natural beauty, ecological features and recreational resources of statewide significance; to provide outdoor recreational opportunities in a safe and healthy environment; and to provide environmental education opportunities that promote stewardship of the state's natural heritage.”*



Specifically for Chimney Rock State Park, the mission is to satisfy the vision set forth in this master plan and to ensure that the facilities and operations of the state park conserve and protect the natural assets while offering sustainable visitor access and use of the park and its resources. The mission will be achieved through five principal goals.

*Goal 1: Develop a conservation and resource management program that prioritizes sensitive natural heritage areas and outlines a comprehensive land conservation strategy for existing and future parkland.*

*Goal 2: Provide a variety of high quality, sustainable, natural resource-based outdoor recreation opportunities to meet the diverse needs of park visitors.*

*Goal 3: Expand interpretive opportunities through the establishment of Chimney Rock State Park educational programs and the development of new day use areas and facilities.*

*Goal 4: Centralize park facilities to improve access and operational efficiency between park users and management.*

*Goal 5: Explore the feasibility of establishing a network of regional trails that links park and other public areas within the Hickory Nut Gorge region, thereby strengthening the local economy and enhancing community activity.*

*This page: Rocky exposed cliffs with the Rocky Broad River below.*



## PARK DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

The Chimney Rock State Park development program will satisfy the vision, mission and goals through three principal strategies: *Conservation Management*; *Education and Stewardship*; and *Access and Recreation*.



*Protecting natural assets*

### CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT

Where there is a high concentration of rare species and wildlife habitat as well as significant natural features, construction of facilities will be limited. These areas will provide opportunities for hiking, nature study, photography, scientific research, and other appropriate low-impact activities.



*Providing opportunities for learning and stewardship*

### EDUCATION AND STEWARDSHIP

Part of the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation's mission is to provide opportunities for learning and stewardship of natural resources. To accomplish this within Chimney Rock State Park, interpretive and educational facilities and programming will be developed to serve students, teachers, university researchers and the general public.



*Providing access to unique sites and recreation activities*

### ACCESS AND RECREATION

Chimney Rock State Park offers exceptional opportunities for access to scenic vistas, breathtaking landscapes and challenging outdoor activity. Specific land and resource areas of the park will be available for a diverse range of outdoor recreation, environmental education and public use. These activities will be encouraged and supported through programs that promote sustainable access and use. It is critically important that recreation areas of the park be capable of supporting use for generations to come.

## CHIMNEY ROCK STATE PARK LANDS

To accomplish park expansion, the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation will continue its practice of partnering with conservation organizations, local governments and landowners to acquire, conserve and protect additional lands that fulfill the purpose of Chimney Rock State Park. Natural resource protection, scenic viewshed preservation, outdoor recreation and public access are some of the primary motives for pursuing additional lands and resources for Chimney Rock State Park.

## VISITOR CENTER

A proposed 6,500 square foot visitor center building will be constructed on the southern end of the Meadows. The visitor center is comprised of a new building, attraction ticket office, expanded public parking, park operations and management offices. The building will be designed and implemented using green building strategies to attain Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED®) certification. The building will support visitor reception and lobby, classrooms, offices, exhibit space, concessions, public toilets and storage. The design program will incorporate low impact construction methods such as the use of native construction materials, solar and geothermal heating and cooling (where feasible), rainwater collection, and stormwater best management practices.



### ATTRACTION TICKET OFFICE

For visitors wanting to ascend to the top of Chimney Rock Mountain from the Meadows, a new ticket office will be constructed adjacent to the proposed visitor center, and connected to the visitor center via a covered walkway. The ticket office will be designed and implemented using the same environmental principles as the visitor center.

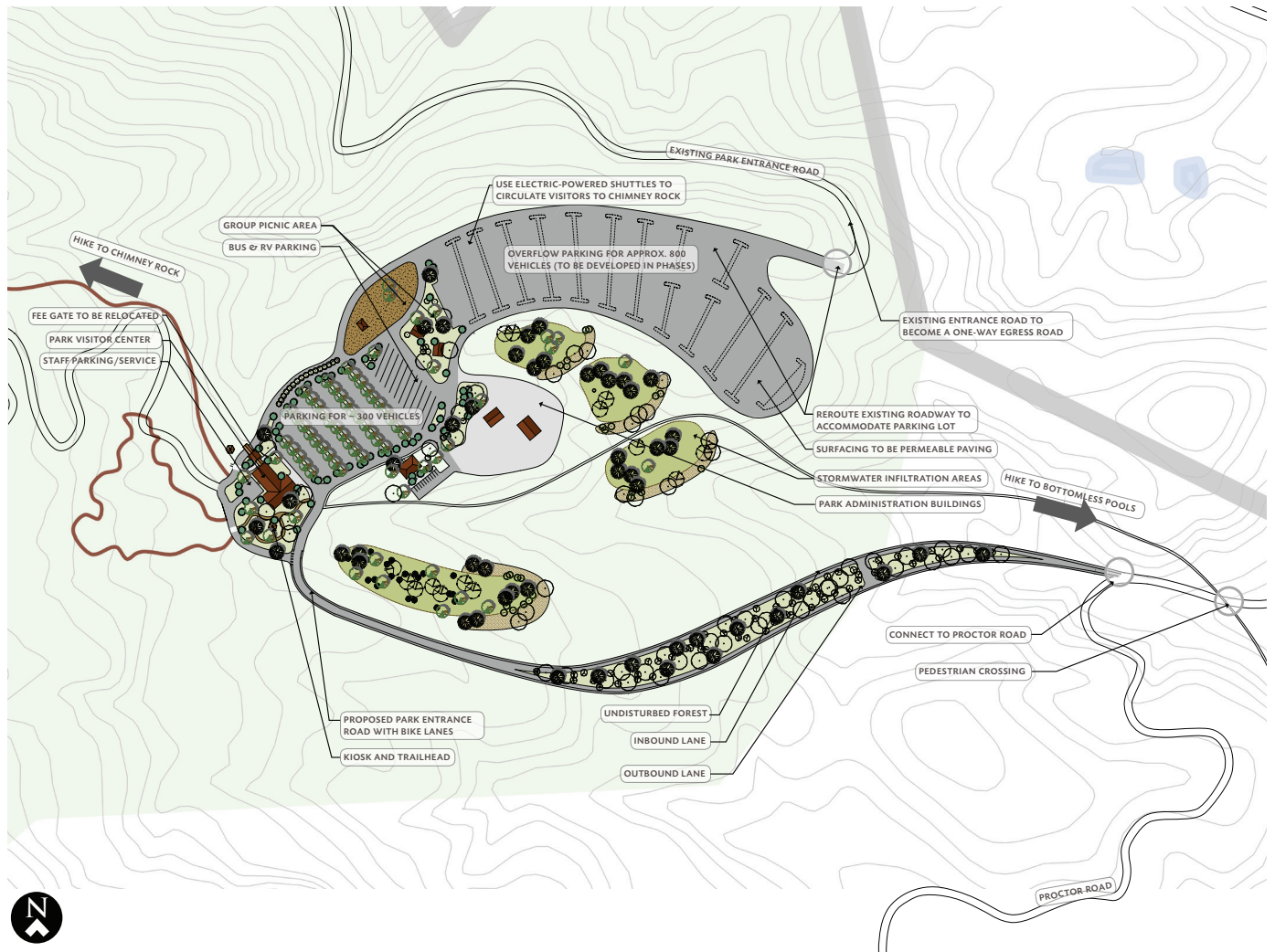
### PUBLIC PARKING

Public parking at the Meadows will utilize permeable paving to reduce stormwater runoff where feasible. The Meadows will accommodate more than 300 cars, 20 busses, RVs, and vehicles with trailers, and bicycles. Construction will involve realignment of the existing entrance roadway, minimal clearing of existing wooded areas, and the installation of stormwater infiltration areas to capture first flush flows from the parking areas.

### PARK OPERATIONS AND MANAGEMENT OFFICES

In addition to the visitor center building, new park operation, management, and maintenance offices will be constructed at the eastern end of the Meadows. The purpose of these offices is to centralize park operations staff, maintenance equipment, and supplies. These offices will be designed and implemented using the same environmental principles as the visitor center.

### VISITOR CENTER AT THE MEADOWS





## ACCESS AND CIRCULATION

A new access and circulation strategy is proposed for Chimney Rock State Park that includes support for auto, transit, bicycle and pedestrian travel. One of the primary goals of the new access and circulation strategy is to help alleviate automobile congestion on U.S. Route 64/74A through Chimney Rock Village and the Town of Lake Lure.

### NEW STATE PARK ENTRANCE ROAD

A new state park entry road will be constructed from the Town of Lake Lure, connecting to the lower portion of Proctor Road. From its intersection with Proctor Road, the new road will feature a split inbound and outbound lane design to minimize impact to the existing forest canopy. The roadway will be built to modern standards, with bicycle lanes on both the inbound and outbound lanes. The lower portion of Proctor Road will be widened to accommodate new traffic flow. The current entrance road from Chimney Rock Village will be transformed into a state park exit road.

### HICKORY NUT GORGE TRANSIT CIRCULATOR

A transit circulator, operated independently from Chimney Rock State Park, is proposed for the Hickory Nut Gorge region. The circulator will be similar to those operated at United States National Parks, such as the Island Explorer at Arcadia National Park. The circulator will make use of fuel-efficient vehicles (i.e. natural gas or electric powered busses) and will include transit stops in Chimney Rock Village, Town of Lake Lure and Chimney Rock State Park. The circulator will encourage visitors to park their cars at designated locations and board fuel efficient busses for transport throughout the region to popular destinations. With a circulator in place, it is hoped that vehicle congestion throughout the Hickory Nut Gorge region will be minimized, air quality will be improved, and traffic flow will be more efficient.

### UTILITY CORRIDOR

New utility lines will be installed in conjunction with the construction of a new entrance road from the Town of Lake Lure to the Meadows at Chimney Rock State Park. A new water line, along with a pump station, will be installed and connected to the Town of Lake Lure water supply. A new sanitary sewer line will also be installed from the Meadows to the Town of Lake Lure to service the new visitor center, and park operations and management offices. A new, modern communications line will also be installed to deliver improved voice, high-speed data and internet into the state park.

## DAY USE AREAS

Three new day use areas will be built at Bottomless Pools, World's Edge and Rumbling Bald. For all proposed day use areas, buildings will be designed and implemented using sustainable construction strategies.

### BOTTOMLESS POOLS DAY USE AREA

The Bottomless Pools attraction will be developed into a state park day use area. The historic home associated with Bottomless Pools will be used as a contact station and information center. Some of the original viewing platforms will be restored and reopened for public access and use. The existing trail system will also be restored and constructed to provide new observation platforms for viewing of the famed Bottomless Pools. A public parking lot will support parking for up to 60 cars. Bottomless Pools will provide parking for connections to Chimney Rock State Park trails and Hickory Nut Gorge regional trails.

### WORLD'S EDGE DAY USE AREA

The World's Edge day use area will include an overlook, public parking, a contact station, trail concessions, and picnic areas.



*Bottomless Pools*

### **RUMBLING BALD DAY USE AREA**

An undersized day use area already exists off of Boys Camp Road on the southwest side of Rumbling Bald Mountain. The existing day use area will be improved to support the increase in vehicle parking and a second day use area will be built east of the existing Rumbling Bald climbing day use area. The proposed secondary location off of Boys Camp Road will provide additional accommodation for rock climbing and other passive recreation activities. This new day use area will include public parking for up to 60 cars, picnic areas, toilet building, concessions, and short loop trails for hiking.



*View from Rumbling Bald*



## ATTRACTION FACILITIES

The attraction at Chimney Rock State Park is comprised of many features and facilities formerly operated by the Morse family, most of which are now operated by a concessionaire to the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation. The following describes the current status and improvements for key elements of the attraction.

### ATTRACTION ENTRANCE ROAD

The entrance road from the Meadows to the Cliff Dwellers gift shop will require improvement in order to accommodate two-way auto and bus traffic. This will include widening portions of the road, reinforcing and/or rebuilding retaining walls, and reworking drainage systems.

### ELEVATOR AND TUNNEL

The historic tunnel and elevator that takes visitors from Cliff Dwellers to the Sky Lounge is being upgraded and improved with modern elevator equipment in 2011.

### CLIFF DWELLERS

The Cliff Dwellers gift shop is generally in good condition but will require some renovation to the exterior and interior.

### SKY LOUNGE

The Sky Lounge will be improved in 2011 and later adapted into an interpretive area. The existing shop and food service area will be moved to other venues throughout the state park.

### OLD ROCK CAFÉ

The Old Rock Café, located in Chimney Rock Village, will be completely renovated and modernized. The building's interior and exterior will be repainted and refinished, and the restrooms will be expanded to accommodate more visitors.

### ATTRACTION TRAILS

The trails of the attraction are one of the most important features of Chimney Rock State Park. Many of these trails are worn and in need of restoration and repair. It will be important to improve these trails to meet minimum standards for public use and safety, in accordance with State of North Carolina guidelines.

## STATE PARK HIKING TRAILS

New long distance hiking trails will be developed as part of the expanded Chimney Rock State Park. Trails systems in the southern and northern part of the state park will be connected to the Hickory Nut Gorge regional trail system. Trails of various difficulty, length, and interest are proposed to provide a diverse experience that can be enjoyed by visitors regardless of their abilities. Families, senior citizens, and experienced hikers will have the option to select and plan their trip: from as little as a one to two hour hike, to overnight hikes with primitive camping.





## CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN CHIMNEY ROCK STATE PARK HIKING TRAILS

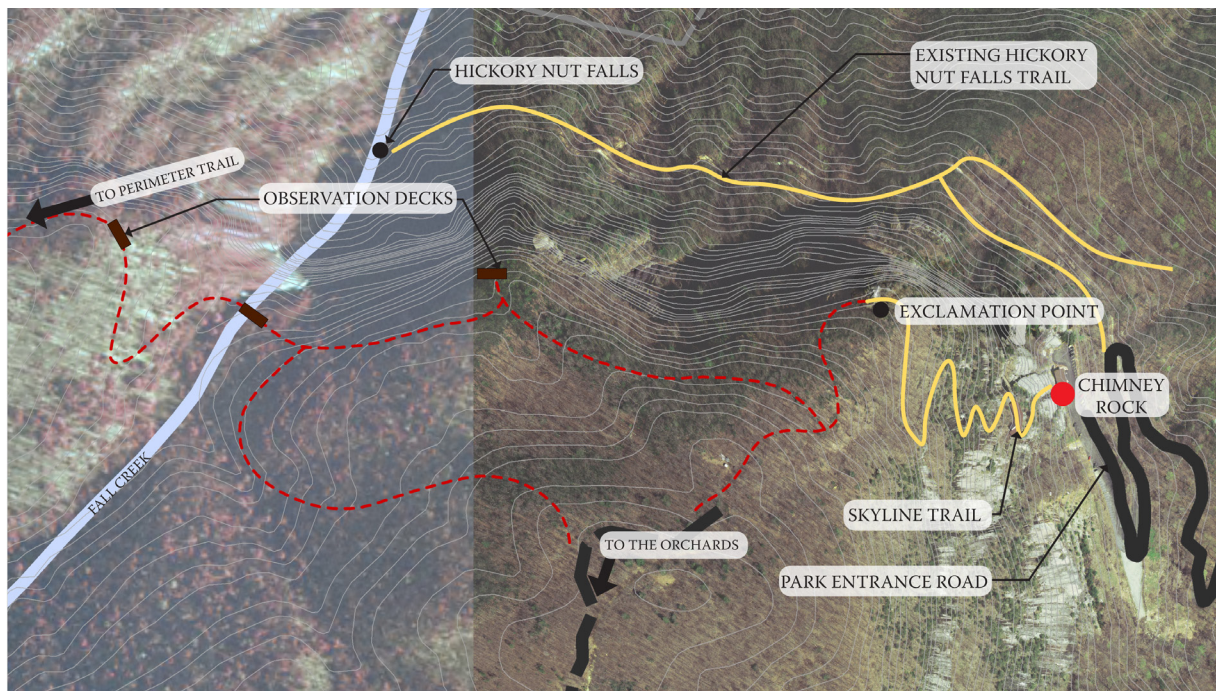
The Chimney Rock Mountain Perimeter Trail is envisioned as an extended, multi-day experience for long distance hikers. This 15-mile moderate to difficult hiking trail will extend from the Orchards on Chimney Rock Mountain to the base of Sugarloaf Mountain, then to World's Edge, and along the ridgeline of Cane Creek Mountain. Along the route, three proposed primitive campgrounds will accommodate those who wish to experience this challenging multi-day hike.

### SKYLINE AND CLIFF TRAILS

It is important that Chimney Rock State Park balance the conservation, protection and preservation of natural resources with access and enjoyment of those resources. The existing design of the upper Skyline and Cliff trails cannot be properly managed to support public access and use, due to environmental factors, concerns regarding public health, safety and welfare, and budget constraints.

A new alignment for the Skyline Trail will be established from Exclamation Point along the top of Chimney Rock Mountain to designated observation areas on top of the mountain. Observation platforms will be constructed to provide views of the top of Hickory Nut Falls, Hickory Nut Gorge and Lake Lure. The proposed trail will be constructed inside the existing tree line and not on the cliff faces of Chimney Rock Mountain. The Cliff trail could be opened in the future in cooperation with a contractor who guides adventure tours, such as a via ferrata.

A proposed trail will also be developed connecting the new visitor center at the Meadows to Bottomless Pools. This trail will link with local greenways so visitors can access adjacent regional activities in both Chimney Rock Village and the Town of Lake Lure.



*New alignment for Skyline and Cliff trails will be more environmentally friendly.*



## NORTHERN CHIMNEY ROCK STATE PARK HIKING TRAILS

New hiking trails are proposed for development on the southwest side of Rumbling Bald, between Boys Camp Road and the top of Rumbling Bald Mountain. Hiking trails in northern Chimney Rock State Park are proposed around southern Rumbling Bald, Shumont Mountain, and Eagle Rock. These trails will range from moderate to difficult in terms of accessibility. The trails will be developed in a series of loops in order to provide a level of challenge for various hikers. Backcountry trails are proposed at the far reaches north of Rumbling Bald, where hike-in primitive camping will be available. Backcountry trails in this location are more remote and further from day use areas. Connections to Weed Patch Mountain, and proposed mountain biking trails, will also be possible from this area.

## HICKORY NUT GORGE REGIONAL TRAILS

A number of regional trails are proposed throughout Hickory Nut Gorge. Many of these trails are proposed to link into and through Chimney Rock State Park. Regional trails that link to the state park will be developed in coordination with the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation.

## STATE PARK ACTIVITIES

In addition to hiking trails, Chimney Rock State Park will support other natural resource-based activities where visitors can access and enjoy a variety of outdoor pursuits.



### ROCK CLIMBING

Chimney Rock State Park will host one of the premiere mountain climbing areas in the southeastern United States. Existing trails and day use parking areas on Boys Camp Road will be improved to accommodate peak season visitation. Climbing areas in the state park will be permitted along the southern facing cliffs of Rumbling Bald Mountain and the boulder fields at Rumbling Bald owned by the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation. Additional climbing areas in the park will be considered in a comprehensive climbing and bouldering plan.



### MOUNTAIN BIKING

A single-track mountain biking trail system is proposed in the vicinity of Weed Patch Mountain. A minimum 10-mile network of trails is recommended, with opportunities for primitive camping. Mountain bike enthusiasts will access Weed Patch Mountain through a parcel owned by the Town of Lake Lure from Buffalo Creek Road. The Town of Lake Lure plans to develop a park and trailhead facilities at this location. Management of the mountain bike trails will be in partnership with the Town of Lake Lure, the mountain bike community, and the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation.



### PRIMITIVE CAMPING

All proposed camping will be primitive, with access to the trail network. Four primitive campgrounds will be located throughout Chimney Rock State Park. Visitors will access primitive campgrounds by permit and will be required to backpack to the campsites. Primitive campgrounds will be located at:

- *Orchards – top of Chimney Rock Mountain*
- *World's Edge*
- *Cane Creek Mountain*
- *Rumbling Bald Mountain*



## PICNICKING

Picnicking will be made available to park visitors at all day use areas and at the visitor center. Some picnic areas are proposed along the hiking trails in north and south Chimney Rock State Park. These more remote picnicking areas will be implemented based on demand and operational considerations.

## INTERPRETIVE FACILITIES

In addition to the educational facilities proposed at the visitor center, there are a variety of opportunities to interpret the natural heritage of the park and the region. The development of outdoor exhibits at day use areas and along hiking trails will form an interpretive network. The network will be self-guided or organized by park staff as guided hikes or educational programs. The scenery in Chimney Rock State Park will be enjoyed from vistas and viewing platforms that incorporate interpretive signage. The overlooks will be strategically located along trails and at some day use areas.